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BYRON BERKELEY JOHNSON





# Abraham Lincoln *and* Boston Corbett

WITH PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS  
OF EACH

# John Wilkes Booth *and* Jefferson Davis

A TRUE STORY  
OF THEIR CAPTURE

BYRON BERKELEY JOHNSON  
WALTHAM, MASS.  
1914

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## PREFACE

A recent imperfect brochure of mine relating to Boston Corbett, who shot John Wilkes Booth, the assassinator of President Lincoln, has brought requests for more of the history of this unique character. Its study forces us to link it with the death of Lincoln, the end of Booth and the capture of Jefferson Davis, the inspiring angel of Booth on his last mission.

The recording of real personal recollections assists in making genuine history, and furnishes a flavor delightful to the public taste. I will present some personal items about Lincoln and Corbett, and testimony from official records—that we may see the characteristics of the two men, and then by an analysis of other facts get a correct view of the tragic end of Booth, and of his incentives to his mad career.

We will examine the exciting and singular Kansas life of Corbett. Bringing the truth out of the many versions relating to the capture of Jefferson Davis, we shall find that the ridiculous stories, published by the northern press, of his fleeing in his wife's dress and crinoline, emanated in the fertile brain of the General commanding the "raid into Alabama and Georgia," and had no foundation in fact. We can afford to bear honest testimony even at this late date.

B. B. JOHNSON

Waltham, Mass., 1914



## CHAPTER I

### A FEW PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS ILLUSTRATIVE OF LINCOLN'S METHODS, HIS KEEN PERCEPTIONS AND INNER LIFE.

October 7th, 1858, I was sent by a committee of young Republicans of Des Moines County, Iowa, to Galesburg, Illinois, to secure Mr. Lincoln for a public address at Burlington, Iowa.

Hon. James Harlan, U. S. Senator from Iowa, was to be a guest at the Lincoln and Douglas debate. He later became the father-in-law of Robert T. Lincoln.

Armed with a letter from Ex-Governor Grimes, I received an invitation to a seat on the platform. At the close of the debate Senator Harlan introduced me to the speakers. A few words by Senator Harlan, supplementing the Governor's letter, received a prompt, "I will come."

He came, and I had the pleasure of calling an immense audience to order and of introducing Governor Grimes to preside. The speech, along the line of the famous debates,

lasting nearly two hours, was delivered in an easy, calm manner, full of pungent truth, sparkling humor and grand appeals for an uplift of conscience.

In 1860, I had the privilege of being in the wigwam convention which nominated him for President—and of acting as an alternate at the second ballot.

People cannot appreciate how the great men of the country outdid themselves in the enthusiasm caused by two men carrying through the wigwam one of the rails split by Mr. Lincoln to fence out the wolves from his father's cabin.

Soon after his inauguration, I was appointed to an important position in the U. S. Mail Service, west of the Mississippi River. I raised a Company directly after the Fort Sumpter episode, but on a physical examination was not allowed to go into service. When the Civil War was well under way, being transferred to the War Department at Washington, I was enabled to renew the acquaintance begun at Galesburg, and which continued until the assassination.

Illustrations of the President's characteristics are numerous—many given are genuine and some are fakes.

A few came under my personal observation, which at the risk of repetition I give.

In his office, one morning after a great battle, he was visibly depressed, and seemed unable to settle down to work.

He took from his pocket a Testament, his constant companion, read a few verses, wiped away a tear—went to his tasks refreshed.

Detailed by Assistant Secretary of War P. H. Watson, to go with the President to Armory Square Hospital, to give him an insight into the service rendered to the sick and wounded by the various State agents, which I could do as a volunteer visitor for the Massachusetts agent, we were passing through the wards where ahead of us was a woman with a basket of miscellaneous tracts, which she distributed without regard to subject or intended readers.

As we approached a group of soldiers whom she had served with tracts, they were laughing quite vigorously, and one was calling attention to his tract. The President assumed that he was making fun of the woman and said "My boy, I wouldn't laugh at her, she thinks she is doing good work and so do I." Then he told of a tract he received when a lad, how it had influenced him for permanent good. The soldier, holding up his tract, replied, "You wouldn't laugh? Look at the thing." Across the face in great black letters he read, "The Sin of Dancing," and added, "and both of my

legs off at the knees." The President laughed heartily, and turning said to me, "That's the best evidence I ever saw of misapplied philanthropy." Contributors to the needs of the soldiers had but little idea of the extent of the misapplication of their charities.

It is said that "a little child shall lead them." "Tad" did lead the President for the picture, and could have his father's attention whenever it was possible. The President loved the soldiers, and seemed to feel that he had a personal responsibility for their welfare. In September, 1864, a telegram from Burlington, Iowa, asked me to obtain the President's autograph to be sold there at a soldiers' fair, to be opened that week. I secured an album and went to his office, where he seemed too absorbed to permit interruption. Nicolay and Hay were there. I told Nicolay my errand and proposed to leave the book and return later. The President had caught the words "soldiers' fair," asked what was wanted, took the album, wrote on its first page "A. Lincoln," and handed it to his secretaries for their signatures on the same page. Cabinet members Seward, Stanton, Welles, Bates and Blair added their names. Secretaries Chase and Smith were absent. Many prominent autographs were added and the book sent by express the next day to a friend at Burlington with my bid.



Mine was the highest and I have the album now. Later the President asked me who got it; to my reply, said "you deserved it."

As President of the Sunday School Union, I stood by his side, when from a White House balcony he reviewed our annual parade, which passed through the grounds. As it entered at the east gate—some boys were leading—he said "I never see boys like those but what I wonder what is in their heads; you never can tell. They remind me of a boy named Daniel who attended a district school in New England, and was in the habit after recess, of coming into the school with dirty hands. The master had remonstrated and punished him without much improvement. One day he saw Daniel's hands were quite dirty and he called him to his desk." (Mr. Lincoln, as he told the story, acted it.) "The boy holding his dirty left hand close to his side, as he moved on, spat on his right hand and wiped it on his pants. At the desk, the master, ferrule in hand, lectured him and to shame him said 'if you will find me another as dirty a hand as this one in the room I will let you off this time.' Immediately he was confronted with that left hand extended. You can't tell what's in a boy's head." That boy was Daniel Webster. Was there ever a better illustration of "you can't tell what is in a boy's head" than Abraham Lincoln?

His modesty was shown in 1858 when requested to furnish his 1849 autobiography for the new work a "Congressional Directory," he wrote, "I was born in Harding County, Kentucky, February, 12th, 1809. Education, defective; profession, lawyer. Post master at a small place. Captain in the Black Hawk War. Four times member of the Illinois legislature. Was a member of the Lower House of Congress."

I heard him say that in the Black Hawk War he was "sent down South, did not see an Indian, but had several bloody battles with mosquitos." The blacks of the South had learned that their former masters feared Lincoln, whom they had never seen. Col. McKayne, Superintendent of the Contraband Camp at Beaufort, told this story to the President and others of us at the White House. "Last Sunday the colored preacher and I came into the camp and found the negroes greatly excited by a discussion of 'what am Massum Linkum like?' The old preacher said, 'Yous knows nothing 'bout Massum Linkum. I tell you what Massum Linkum am like. He is jes like Jesu Christ, he go up and down de earth.' That seemed to satisfy them." Brushing tears away the President said, "Col. it is a great responsibility to be the agent for freeing a race." Do you wonder that those

who knew Lincoln personally loved him, and that time has drawn universal affection?

It is interesting to note some of the ideas formed by "Young America" of his career. It illustrates the imperfectness of the study, and possibly of the teaching of the Civil War history. Some illustrations will show the importance of a correct early education. At a school celebration, in a Boston district, of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, compositions were written by scholars and read at the celebration service. One read "Aberham Lincon was borned in a bright summer day the 12th Feb. 1899. He was borned in a log cabin he had helped his father to build."

We cannot "tell what is in a boy's head."

Another and older scholar in the district had a wide sweeping vision of historical events and of Lincoln's nobleness of character, and recorded the same in a prize essay as follows: "Abraham Lincoln was not the Father of His Country, like G. Washington was, because the country was already born when A. Lincoln arrived in it, through a log cabin in Kentucky or Virginia, I forget which. His folks was so poor that he did not have no overcoat nor under things until he was twenty-five years old, but he was clothed in Noble Manhood. He wrote the Emancipation Procklermation

which gave their Freedom to 50,000,000 slaves which made them our equal except in color, which neither they nor A. Lincoln could help. He was a tall, bony, powerful man, both physically and mentally and could swing a axe with power hence he was given the nom de ploom of the rail-splitter. He was the friend of all from the lowest down poor man of all colors to the highest up rich man with his palace and automobile. If a man was honest A. Lincoln asked no questions, hence he was called Honest Abe. He knew that a true heart could beat beneath a black as well as a white skin, if both was clean. He beat in the great Civil War, which made him the People's Idle and at last landed him in the White House as our Noble President, A. Lincoln."

Lincoln "believed in God as the Supreme Ruler of the world—the guider of men—the controller of the great events of national life, and the destinies of mankind."

He was quite sure that he was a chosen instrument to lead the forces of freedom.

He had endured the privations of the poor whites of the border states. A conception of the fate of the slaves was burned into his brain and on his heart when he saw the slave girl sold at auction in New Orleans. At the time he made the prophetic statement, "Some day I will hit that institution hard."

He believed that the Declaration of Independence should be the standard of all political action.

When the Republican party of Illinois was founded he said, "Take the Declaration of Independence and Hostility to the Extension of Slavery for your platform, build on it, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against us."

About two years later he was debating with Douglas, in the seven memorable discussions—the latter's inconsistency in trying to satisfy both the non-extension views of the North and the extension rights claimed by the South. The writer cannot forget Lincoln's arraignment of Douglas' double role, the keen irony and unanswerable logic, at the Galesburg debate, October 7, 1858, to which he listened. Lincoln compelled Douglas to admit that the only correct standard was, that "right makes might."

At the Cooper Institute in 1860, Mr. Lincoln appealed to the world with these words, "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." On the same platform later, when Lincoln's record had been written on the hearts and minds of all men, Carl Schurz said—"No American President ever wielded such power as that which was thrust into Lincoln's hands. But no man was

ever entrusted with it to whom its seductions were less dangerous than they proved to be to Abraham Lincoln.”

Schuyler Colfax in his memorable memorial address at Chicago, brought to view Mr. Lincoln’s nature and his reasons for its frequent application during the Civil War. “He bore the nation’s perils, trials and sorrows ever on his mind. You knew him in a large degree by the illustrative stories of which his memory and tongue were so prolific, using them to point a moral, or to soften discontent at his decision. But this was the mere outflow which relieved him for the moment from the heavy weight of public duties and responsibilities under which he wearied.”

Abraham Lincoln was peculiarly a “child of the people,” self-educated, honest, modest, pure and tender hearted. At first, homely to the eye, he appealed by a face lightened by the fire of his spirit, his humor and human sympathy, directly to one’s heart.

Liberator—as the agent of God, of a race—patiently he waited and bore the reproach of the impatient, until he saw God’s time at hand. (For his description of his vision read his second inaugural address.) Then, “with malice toward none, with charity for all,” he uttered the world-reaching word, “Free.”

Such was the man shot by the profligate Booth.

Well may we all look into his character and motives, and accept General Grant's statement of Lincoln's life and service, "They will ever grow brighter as time passes and his great work is better understood."

We can see our duty and pleasure today, expressed in a Californian's 1909 verse :

“Land of our loyal love and hope,  
O land he died to save,  
Bow down, renew today thy vows  
Beside his martyr grave.”







JOHN WILKES BOOTH—WHO SHOT PRESIDENT LINCOLN, APRIL 14, 1865



## CHAPTER II.

### THE ASSASSINATION OF LINCOLN AND CAPTURE OF BOOTH.

The story of the assassination in most of its details is familiar to all, and is undisputed up to the time Booth was discovered in the Garrett barn. What happened there has been imperfectly told by writers having no personal knowledge, and who have not known or accepted record evidence at its worth.

Some features have quite recently been attributed to Lieut. Doherty which were due to Col. Conger. Boston Corbett's part has never been fairly and fully told in print, so far as I have been able to learn.

At the time I resided on "H" street—between Ninth and Tenth streets, Washington. Ford's Theatre fronted on Tenth street. From my front door, looking directly south, we could see most of the theatre building. To the east, on the opposite side of "H" street we could see the Surratt house, where the plot was planned. The Peterson house into which the President was carried — directly opposite the

theatre, was one where I had visited. The room where he died, at the rear of the front lower hall, was occupied by William T. Clark, Co. D. 13th Mass. Vols. Mr. Clark was a fine penman and after the battle at Antietam was detailed for duty in the office of the Adjutant General. In this room, I had a glance of the dying President about half an hour before he expired.

An unreported incident enlivened our situation, which illustrated the disloyalty of some of the beneficiaries of the government patronage, and the shrewdness of a little "Topsy" girl, born a slave.

Soon after Booth shot the President, several squares including Ford's Theatre, the Peterson house, Surratt's and our block were surrounded by military, who controlled egress and ingress on the 15th. At noon, upon reaching home from the War Department, my wife informed me that "Topsy" had whispered over the rear division fence, "rebel flag in de parlor under de carpet in front" and then ran in. The family were dependent upon two sons, clerks in the Treasury Department, drawing salaries of twelve and fourteen hundred dollars.

They were anxiously awaiting the arrival of Jefferson Davis and expecting to run out the flag to welcome him. An arrangement was

soon made with the patrol officer, a Massachusetts Captain, and two soldiers passed up through my house to the front balustrade, where they pushed in the window door, and found and carried away the flag. Who told of it was a mystery to them, as well as was the ultimate disposal of the flag to us.

### A TRUE STORY OF BOOTH'S CAPTURE

In forming our opinion of the particulars of Booth's capture and tragic death we need to remember some never disputed facts; namely,—

Booth broke his leg when he leaped to the theatre platform.

In the alley where his horse was mounted, a colored woman recognized and spoke to him and the man assisting him to mount.

She gave the first notice of his manner of escape.

Booth was treated for his injury at Dr. Mudd's.

The boot removed from the broken leg was there found bearing the initials "J. W. B."

The mate boot was on Booth when found.

Booth's route of escape was told by a negro at Port Royal.

At Bowling Green a rebel Captain told under coercion that Booth was at the Garrett

farm. Col. Conger, in charge of the pursuit, knew Booth.

Booth gave his final message for his mother to Col. Conger.

Booth asserted that Harold had committed no crime.

Harold said he met Booth, a stranger, outside of Washington.

The conspirators' trial proved Harold to have been a party assisting Booth in the preliminaries at Washington.

Dr. May who had operated upon Booth, before he saw the body, described certain scars caused by his operation — which were found.



EDWIN M. STANTON, SECRETARY OF WAR 1865.





## THE CAPTURE

At the date of the assassination, Gen. L. C. Baker, Chief of the National Detective Police, was in New York.

Secretary Stanton recalled him and gave him entire charge of the pursuit of Booth.

At Baker's request, Gen. Sweitzer, commanding the Lincoln Barracks at Washington, was directed to "detail a reliable and discreet officer, with twenty-five men, well mounted, with three days rations to report to Gen. Baker."

Lieut. Edward P. Doherty, Co. L. 16th N. Y. Cavalry was selected, he to choose the men from his Company. When he announced the service and that he would take the first twenty-five volunteering, Sergeant Corbett was the first to respond.

Lieut. Col. Everett J. Conger, who had been in active service was selected to have absolute control of the raid.

Lieut. Baker, cousin of the General, was assigned to act with Conger.

General Baker ordered them to "capture but not to shoot Booth."

When, acting upon the information furnished by the negro and squeezed from the rebel Captain, they reached the Garrett farm, Lieut. Doherty ordered Corbett to "deploy the men

around the house and allow no one to escape.” This order obeyed, the three officers entered the house, where they found Garrett and his son. Garrett refused all information, and when the son feared the acts of the officers, he yielded and said Booth was in the barn. Lieut. Doherty ordered Corbett to leave four men at the house and deploy the remainder “around the barn and allow no one to escape.” The barn was a tobacco dry house, with open spaces between the boards.

Col. Conger then called to Booth to give up his arms and he refused.

He then directed Lieut. Baker to take young Garrett, Booth’s friend, and go in for the weapons. They entered and Booth accused Garrett of betrayal, and drove them out. After a parley, Harold offered to surrender. Booth told him he was a coward and to go, calling out that Harold had committed no crime.

Lieut. Doherty ordered Harold to put out his hands, which he tied together, then tied him to a tree.

Corbett then proposed to Col. Conger to go in and bring Booth out, and Conger refused.

Conger again demanded Booth to surrender. He answered—“No, I prefer to come out and fight.”

Conger then told him he would burn him

out, and directed Garrett to pile pine boughs about the barn, which he did until Booth called out — "If you put any more brush against the barn I will put a ball through you," and Garrett quit.

Corbett finding that Conger meant to fire the barn, asked Lieut. Doherty to let him go in for Booth, but he declined. Conger again told Booth to "Surrender or I will set the fire." Conger immediately set the fire and Booth called out — "Captain, make quick work of it and shoot me through the heart." Lieut. Baker replied, "We don't want to shoot you."

Booth answered, "Well, my brave boys, you can prepare a stretcher for me."

Corbett being unwilling that Booth should be burned to death, again asked Doherty for permission to bring Booth out, and was refused.

The heat caused Booth to change his position, which he did, carbine in hand, to a spot where he had an unobstructed view of both Doherty and Corbett. Two of Corbett's comrades told him Booth would shoot him. He kept his eye steadily on Booth, who raised his pistol to shoot, when Corbett, feeling sure that his commander or himself would be shot, fired and Booth fell.

Conger, Baker and Doherty rushed in and brought Booth out. To Col. Conger he said,

“Tell my mother I die for my country” and soon expired.

Lieut. Doherty sewed the body up in a blanket, sent out and impressed a negro having an old shack of a horse and wagon, put the body into the wagon and went to Belle Plain, where he was relieved of responsibility.

All of the above statements were given to me by Corbett, and are fully corroborated by the official record of the testimony of Col. Conger, Lieuts. Baker and Doherty and Sergeant Corbett, before the Military Commission on May 17, 1865.

Corbett was charged by Conger with breach of military discipline “in firing without Doherty’s order, and in defiance of Gen. Baker’s order,” and was returned to the Washington camp to await court-martial.

Baker’s United States Secret Service—p. 537 contains the report of Col. Conger and Lieut. Baker to Secretary Stanton. It says: “Boston Corbett \* \* without order, pretext or excuse shot Booth,” and “Lieut. Baker said to Col. Conger the man who fired it should go back to Washington under arrest.”

It is to be noted that Corbett was the only one not afraid. He realized that Booth would be “roasted alive,” and his course was the more merciful in fact. He felt that he had done the right act, and was greatly irritated by

being confined to the camp, with none to intercede for him. I first met him at the Christian Commission rooms, and later he had been to our house to dinner. He sent for me, and after a talk with his superiors, I reported the interview to Secretary Stanton, a man of few words and prompt action. He ordered the Lieutenant and Sergeant to be produced before him as soon as possible.

Soon there were assembled in his office, the Secretary, Assistant-Secretary Dana, the Adjutant-General, Lieut. Doherty, Sergeant Corbett, a Washington reporter, and myself.

The questions and answers were direct and short. Lieut. Doherty stated the facts—said that Corbett shot Booth without orders, that he was a brave and true soldier, sometimes impulsive.

Corbett's version differed only in the additional information of his offers to go in for Booth. He insisted that he had done right, as Booth would have shot Doherty or himself.

Lieut. Doherty admitted that the Sergeant made the offers as stated by him.

After a conference with Assistant-Secretary Dana, Mr. Stanton complimented Lieut. Doherty—approved of his holding Corbett for the action of his superiors and said, "The rebel is dead—the patriot lives—he has saved us con-

tinued excitement, delay and expense — the patriot is released.”

Edwin M. Stanton was a great lawyer. Quick to discern dissembling, he believed Corbett shot Booth, and that he was brave and true.

Corbett went home to dine with me. A great crowd gathered and clamored for him. Out of respect for Secretary Stanton, he promised he would not make a speech. I then took him up to the porch, and when the people had shouted until tired, he said, “Fellows, I am glad to see you. Johnson won’t let me make a speech. Good bye.”

After dinner we went to Brady’s for his photo to be taken, the one which follows this chapter. On the back it is endorsed “To Mr. B. B. Johnson with kindest regards. Boston Corbett.”

## CHAPTER III

### LIFE OF CORBETT

What is the truth about Corbett's strange career? Let us view his youth—emigration to America—his trade—bitter experiences in New York — life in Boston — military service with four enlistments — starvation at Andersonville “Bull Pen”—lay preaching—career in Kansas—adjournment, revolver in hand, of the Kansas Legislature — commitment to the Insane Asylum and escape into Mexico.

Much has been written about him by doubters of historical truth, who never knew the man. In September, 1913, the Boston Herald contained sketches of him, by an anonymous writer, which I attempted to answer, but evidently the editor thought I did not. After publishing a skeleton of my article he added the following foot note—

“Ed. Mr. Johnson probably knows that Mr. David Miller De Witt, a scholarly historian maintains that Boston Corbett did not shoot Booth at all, but merely pretended to do so, and that Booth killed himself.”

I was not aware that any one believed such a claim.

If there is any fact, connected with President Lincoln's assassination and with the capture and death, more absolutely established than that Corbett never "pretended" and that he did shoot Booth, the records fail to show it. It might as truthfully be said that Booth did not shoot Lincoln. The publication of such a statement as the Herald contained, and others in the Transcript and Globe, are apt to mislead. I propose to review from personal knowledge, official records and witnesses of 1865 the facts, which are:

The arrest of Corbett on the spot by his commanding officer as shown in Chapter II.

The action of Secretary Stanton.

The payment of the reward, under direction of a Committee of Congress.

The testimony of Col. Conger, Lieut. Doherty and Corbett, before the celebrated Commission composed of the following—

Major Generals, David Hunter, Lewis Wallace, A. V. Kautz — Brig. Generals, A. P. Howe, R. S. Foster, T. M. Harris, J. A. Eken and Col. C. H. Tompkins.

Brig. General J. Holt was Judge Advocate General, assisted by Hon. John A. Bingham and Col. H. L. Burnett, two eminent attorneys.

The Commission had before it all the evi-



dence the United States could obtain. The Commission was fully satisfied that Booth died as the result of Corbett's shot.

Col. Conger had no love for Corbett, who suggested that the act of firing the barn was too cruel, but he had to admit that Corbett fired the fatal shot.—Baker's United States Secret Service, page 537.

The day of the death of Booth, before the details were fully known, Secretary Stanton telegraphed to Gen. John A. Dix—"Booth was shot while attempting to escape."

John G. Nicolay and John Hay had access to all lines of evidence when they issued their comprehensive "Life of Lincoln." In Vol. X, Page 312, they record, "Booth was shot by Boston Corbett, a sergeant of Cavalry." Hon. Henry J. Raymond, a member of Congress, an intimate friend of the President, also wrote a "Life of Lincoln." On page 713 he says, "Booth was shot by Sergeant Corbett."

Lieut. Doherty, always, before and after his discharge from the army, stated that Booth was shot by Corbett.

All the surgeons who examined Booth's body declared the shot could not have been self-inflicted.

Gen. Baker was bitter against Corbett to the last. In 1867 he published his "History of the Secret Service." On page 502 he describes the

setting of the fire to the barn in which Booth was, and adds "And so as he (Booth) dashed intent to expire not unaccompanied, a disobedient sergeant, at an eyehole, drew upon him the fatal bead . . . . and John Wilkes Booth fell headlong to the floor, lying there in a heap, a little life remaining."

The proof is too strong to be successfully attacked by any "scholarly historian."

### BOSTON CORBETT'S LIFE

Whenever the story of the assassination of the patriot Commander-in-Chief is told, naturally, alongside stands out the name of the patriot Sergeant, who in four enlistments offered his life for his adopted country and in a special manner to risk it before the assassin's bullets.

Born in London, England, in 1832, named Thomas P., which name he retained until he was baptized in Boston. Then he declared that Christ, when he called his disciples, gave them new names, and that his name should henceforth be Boston Corbett.

In 1839, he came with his parents to New York, and presumably to Troy, N. Y. He struggled in poverty for an education, became a fair scholar and a fluent speaker.

At Troy, he learned the hatters trade and

became very proficient, working there several years, thence went to New York City. He married and lost his wife and infant child at birth. He was unable to meet the expenses he had incurred. He became despondent and a victim of the cup which destroys body and soul unless speedy rescue comes. While under the influence of liquor he strayed into a Salvation Army meeting, where he was detained until sober. They exacted a promise that he would come the next evening.

He was a man of sterling truth—keeping his promises, even when it caused him deprivation. He followed the Army meetings until his moral fibre developed into enthusiastic advocacy of “Come to Christ,” his favorite plea. At the Fulton Street meetings he became known as the “Glory to God” man, and his amens at times were too vociferous. His conduct subsequently at the Bromfield Street Church, Boston, bears the same reputation.

From his photo one would hardly suspect that he was the subject of intense emotion whenever his interest was aroused. In height, he was about five feet five, stocky build, brown eyes, fair face, mild countenance, parted his hair in the middle, and had a clear ringing voice. In 1857, he commenced to work at the shop of Samuel Mason, Jr., a manufacturing hatter at the corner of Dock Square

and Washington Street, Boston. Frequently he visited his employer's home. The stories of him told by Mr. Mason and his nervous aggressiveness did not please Mr. Mason's only daughter, who recalls many incidents of his eccentricities and religious ebullitions.

She pronounces the photograph, here reproduced, an excellent picture, very natural, excepting his hair, which he wore very long "because all the pictures of Christ represented him wearing long locks." This he could not do in the army. In the Mason shop the men worked piece-work, each depending upon the promptness of the next man in passing along his part. Some of the men were at times profane. At such events Corbett would stop, kneeling, offer prayer for the sinners, and sometimes adding a song — all the men would be obliged to hold up work.

Being an expert workman and using great self-denial he was able to discharge all his New York debts. This being accomplished he spent his money for books and tracts, which he distributed at North Square and other North and West End meetings.

At one of his North Square meetings he was accosted by two young women who sought unsuccessfully to inveigle him from the path of virtue. Desiring to have no inclinations in that direction (as he said "to be holy"), he pro-

ceeded to self-castration, for which he was treated in the Massachusetts General Hospital, from July 16 to August 18, 1858.

### MILITARY SERVICE

He appears to have been an early patriot. The first notice of the impending need of soldiers was a telegram received by the Governor from Senator Wilson, April 15, 1861.

Governor Andrew said, "The occasion demands action, and it shall not be delayed by speech."

This seems to have been Corbett's idea. He left immediately for New York, enlisted there as a Private in Co. I, 12th New York Militia, April 19, 1861, for three months. He enlisted again in the same regiment Co. K, June 2, 1862, and was mustered out October 8, 1862.

The 12th New York Militia surrendered at Harpers Ferry, W. Va., in September 1862. It was mustered out at New York October 12, 1862, and declared exchanged January 11, 1863. Corbett again enlisted June 19, 1863, as Corporal in the same organization and was mustered out July 20th, 1863. August 4th, 1863, he enlisted as Sergeant in Co. L, 16th New York Cavalry and was mustered out at Washington with the regiment August 17th, 1865.

Before the 12th was mustered out, its Colonel being angered by the careless obedience of a

few of the men, cursed them in public. Corbett stepped from the ranks and calmly protested such abuse, with the result that he landed in the guard house, from which he emerged smiling, saying he had had a "good time with his God and his Bible."

It is told that "he was very insistent of his rights—in the New York 12th he was being sent out to do some duty which would extend beyond the hour of the expiration of his enlistment—that he called the attention of his Captain and notified him he should quit the duty when his enlistment expired; that he did so — was court-martialed, ordered to be shot but was reprieved and drummed out of camp." This was during his first enlistment. The fact that immediately after his first term he was re-enlisted in the same regiment and later re-enlisted again with a promotion and received three honorable discharges shows that the court martial story is a fiction.

Leupp says he wore his hair while in the army "hanging long against the collars of his uniform." This was not allowed and his photograph shows it was not so.

Leupp says that "notoriety and threatening letters unnerved him." A man that had the nerve he showed in battle, who three times sought to face Booth's carbine, would not be unnerved by publicity or scribblers.

He also says, "he left the army because he felt that the Booth award was not justly awarded." This is another fiction. The first announcement of the award gave Corbett and twenty-five others \$26,000—it gave Gen. Baker and Col. Conger each \$17,500, Lieut. Baker \$5000, Lieut. Doherty, \$2500. To five others who furnished information, a total of \$6500. Gen. Baker claimed that none of the five others were entitled to any portion. Several of us volunteered to seek a rejection of that award—we succeeded, Baker and Conger suffered a cut down—Corbett's final award was over \$2500 and he was satisfied.

*He left the army because the war was over, and his regiment was discharged.*

#### "CORBETT'S CAPTURE AND THE BULL PEN"

His account of his capture by Mosby's troops at Culpepper, Va. will be of more personal interest by his own account, and I give a copy of a letter written by Corbett May 13, 1865.

"I enlisted first in the 12th New York State Militia for three months, and afterwards served two more short terms in the same regiment, and when that was over, I enlisted for three years in the Cavalry service of which I have now served two years. I cannot now tell you

in detail all that I have passed through. But I have fought the rebels more than once. The last and hardest fight I had previous to shooting Booth, was on the 24th of June last, when I faced and fought against a whole column of them, all alone, none but God being with me, to help me, my being in a large field and they being in the road with a high board fence between us, enabled me to hold out against them as long as I did.

But after driving back some that came out from their column to take me, they finally had the fence torn down, and then closed around me, and when my pistol gave out — giving me no more fire — I was captured by them and sent to Andersonville, Ga.

There God was good to me, sparing my life while only another and myself lived to return out of fourteen men of my own Company. But bless the Lord, a score of souls were converted, right on the spot where I lay for three months without any shelter. Many others were, for meetings were held in different parts of the Bull Pen.

I was exchanged at Savannah on the 19th of November, making my imprisonment five months.

After being in the hospital at Annapolis a while, I had a furlough for thirty days and then returned to duty with my regiment. I



have not received any part of the reward, as the trial is occupying all the attention of the authorities who have the matter in hand.

Yours in Christ,

Boston Corbett."

The capture was at Culpepper, and it is said that Mosby, struck by his bravery, would not allow his men to shoot Corbett.

After his muster out, Corbett returned to Mr. Mason's employ, and renewed his activities at the Bromfield Street Church.

About this time a new style of hats came into favor, which were manufactured at Danbury, Conn. This made the work in Boston run light and Corbett went to Danbury, obtained employment and "preached in the country round about."

The next we know of him was at Camden, N. J., where he was well known as an active "Methodist lay preacher."

In 1878, he removed to Kansas and took up a homestead at Concordia, Cloud County, built a "dugout" and lived in it several years, spending his time "as a preacher, in great demand at revival meetings." In September last, a writer to the Boston Herald claimed that he "became a patent medicine pedler and was residing at Enid, Oklahoma." Reliable in-

formation from the Secretary of State at Topeka, Kansas, is as follows:—

“TOPEKA, KANSAS, September 29, 1913.

I am in receipt of your letter of September 26, asking for information concerning Boston Corbett, the slayer of John Wilkes Booth. In reply I beg to advise, that a sketch of the life of Boston Corbett in the Historical Society of this State, prepared by Judge Huron, present police judge of this city, shows that Mr. Corbett was born in England in 1832.

He was chosen assistant doorkeeper of the House of Representatives of the Kansas Legislature for the session of 1887. On February 15, of that year, laboring under the impression that he was being discriminated against by other officers of the House, Mr. Corbett drew a revolver and running the officers from the building created such a commotion that it became necessary to adjourn the Legislature. He was finally seized by the police officers, overpowered and was taken before the probate judge, where he was adjudged insane on the following day. He escaped from the Topeka Asylum for the Insane, May 26, 1888. About a week later he showed up in Neodesha, Kansas, which is in the southeastern part of the state. He was riding the same horse on which he made his escape from the asylum. This

horse had been ridden up to the asylum grounds by a boy and left tied to a post, while the boy was visiting about the grounds. In company with a number of other inmates Mr. Corbett passed near the horse, and seeing him, sprang from the ranks, mounted the horse and rode away. In Neodesha he met a man who served with him as a prisoner in Andersonville prison. He told his old comrade that he had been so shamefully treated that he was going to leave the country and go to Mexico.

Judge Huron who was appointed a guardian for him by the probate court, advises me that this is the last information he has ever had of Mr. Corbett. A few years after bidding farewell to the old comrade in Neodesha, a man claiming to be Boston Corbett made application for a pension under that name. This man was a patent medicine pedler.

Judge Huron investigated the matter and learned that while Corbett was five feet and four inches tall this medicine vender was six feet tall. At that time Corbett was a man past seventy years of age, and the man applying for a pension was under fifty years of age. Judge Huron succeeded in sending the man to the penitentiary at Atlanta, Ga. for three years. I think it safe to say that no one in Kansas knows the whereabouts of Boston Corbett.

Judge Huron has done everything in his power to locate his ward, but as stated above, has learned nothing from him since he bade farewell to his old comrade in Neodesha.

Very truly yours,

CHARLES H. SESSIONS,

Secretary of State."

A later letter from the Secretary of the Historical Society adds the fact that the "old comrade" was Richard Thatcher, who in 1888 was Superintendent of Schools at Neodesha.

It is evident that in 1887 Corbett was living an upright and strenuous life in Kansas.

He became insane twenty-three years after his military service.

In September, 1905, I saw in the New York Sun a notice that a man claiming to be Boston Corbett had been arrested at Dallas, Texas. I immediately communicated with the United States Attorney, and received from him the following under date of November 16, 1905:

"The man whom I prosecuted was not the genuine Boston Corbett, who shot Booth. It was an extremely interesting case. The defendant was uneducated, but very bright, and he from some source, had secured much data, which enabled him to impersonate Boston

Corbett to a remarkable degree. He is now in the United States Penitentiary at Atlanta, Ga.

Yours, etc.

WM. H. ATWILL,  
U. S. Attorney."

November 20, 1913, the Department of Justice at Washington informed me by letter, that "the imposter used the names of James and John Corbett, was committed to prison October 25, 1905, to serve three years for perjury. Was transferred to the government hospital for insane at Washington, D. C., Oct. 26, 1906, and discharged as cured December 24, 1908. That he gave his age as fifty years."

It will be noted that this "very bright" man was cured coincident with the expiration of his term of sentence.

A characteristic of Corbett was generosity. At the time of President Lincoln's funeral, five hundred special cards of admission were issued and were in great demand as souvenirs. Corbett had one which he could not personally use, and asked me to name some one to use it. I suggested that he give it to Captain William S. McFarlin, Co. K, 18th Mass. V. I., which he did. I am told that he kept and prized it until his death at South Carver, Mass., January 17, 1914.

Thus endeth my story of Boston Corbett.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CAPTURE OF JEFFERSON DAVIS.

Booth declared in his final message "I die for my country."

There can be no question but that he believed the cause of the Confederacy was the cause of his country.

He was an undisguised secessionist. Evidence presented before the military commission proved that Booth's first plan was the capture or kidnapping of President Lincoln, and his delivery to the Confederacy.

He had good reasons for believing that to be the desire of the South. When it became evident he could not do that, his purpose was suddenly changed to assassination.

Was his belief warranted? In December, 1864, the Selma Alabama Despatch, a journal of wide circulation, printed an advertisement from a well known citizen, who asked for contributions to a fund of One Hundred Thousand Dollars, and offered to give the first thousand dollars, "to be paid to the man or men who before March 1st, 1865, should capture or kill



JEFFERSON DAVIS, CAPTURED AT IRWINSVILLE, GA., MAY 10, 1865.





Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson and William H. Seward."

An Alabama paper reported Jefferson Davis as approving the offer. His two speeches in April, 1865, in North Carolina, indicate that he did. In forming your judgment on this point, note the three names specified in the offer of reward—then read the evidence showing that Booth took charge of Lincoln; assigned Payne to kill Seward, and Atzeroth to kill Johnson, but who lost courage.

On April 19th, Jefferson Davis was speaking at Charlotte, N. C., when a telegram was handed to him. He read it, then read it aloud to his audience :

"Greensboro, April 19, 1865. To His Excellency President Davis. President Lincoln was assassinated in the theatre in Washington on the night of the 11th inst. Seward's house was entered on the same night and he was repeatedly stabbed and is probably mortally wounded.

John C. Breckenridge."

Davis then to his audience said, "If it were to be done it were better it were well done."

The next day he made another speech, in which he said : "If the same had been done to Andy Johnson, the beast, and to Secretary Stanton, the job would have been complete."

In these facts we see what affected Booth's mind.

In May, 1865, Davis with several of his cabinet, about four thousand troops, and supposed to have all the official records and about six million dollars in specie, was fleeing through the South. The United States sent out several detachments of cavalry under the Department Commanders, to find and follow his trail, and to prevent his reaching a seaport or the Mississippi River. Many false reports were made about his movements, which had to be followed out, with the result of scattering our raiders.

As fast as his troops received news of Lee's surrender, they mostly surrendered or deserted.

May 5th, some reliable information came to officers at Augusta, Ga., which was transmitted to General James H. Wilson at Macon, Ga., commanding the "Alabama and Georgia raid." When Davis reached Washington, Ga., May 4th, he had but 150 armed men, and had disposed of most of the specie. When he left there May 5th, he had but six men armed.

General Wilson in a telegram to Secretary Stanton, furnished May 13th, and in another May 14th, a basis for the ridiculous stories and caricatures of Davis flight, published in all the northern papers — which the facts officially reported to him did not justify. Secretary Stan-

ton believed them until the final report of Col. Pritchard.

Time and truth, and a fair interpretation of all the official information, now corroborated by unofficial witnesses, show that Jefferson Davis *was not clothed in his wife's dress or any other attire of women.*

All of the despatches and official reports concerning the capture have been printed in the "United States Official Record of the Union and Confederate Armies."

The officer in command of the capturing Cavalry was Lieut. Col. Benjamin D. Pritchard, 4th Michigan Cavalry, who had with him about 130 men.

He was the only one authorized to make report to General Wilson. At the Davis tent, when he surrendered, was Colonel Pritchard, Lieutenant Purrington, Corporals Crittenton and Munger, Privates Bee, Bullard and Edwards. All the remainder of the men were around the camp with orders to allow no one to leave their tents, *sentinels being placed at each tent and wagon.*

Colonel Pritchard's despatches and final report are models of good taste. Two despatches of General Wilson, May 13th and 14th, to the Secretary of War, are spectacular and evidently inspired by false information. A reward had been offered for the capture of Davis, but

knowledge of it had not then been communicated to Colonel Pritchard. Colonel Pritchard sent a despatch by courier, seventy-five miles, to General Wilson, as soon as he knew whom he had captured. General Wilson wired it at once to Secretary Stanton, as follows:—

“Macon, Ga., May 12th, 1865.

Hon. E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War.

I have the honor to report that at daylight of the 10th inst., Colonel Pritchard commanding the 4th Michigan Cavalry captured Jefferson Davis and family, Reagan, P. M. General; Colonel Harriman, Private Secretary; Colonel Johnston, Aide de Camp; Colonel Morris, Colonel Lubbeck, Lieutenant Hathaway and others. Colonel Pritchard surprised their camp at Irwinsville in Wilson County, 75 miles southeast of this place. The prisoners will be here tomorrow night and will be forwarded under guard without delay. I will send particulars at once.

Jas. H. Wilson, Bvt-Maj. General.”

Colonel Pritchard's only full report of the details was made to Secretary Stanton at Washington, May 25, 1865, pursuant to a special order, and being made at his leisure, and to the highest authority, must be presumed to be as correct as he could make it.

In the meantime General Wilson interviewed *others* and May 13th, 1865, sent a despatch to Secretary Stanton in which he says—

“*The captors report* that he (Davis) hastily put on one of Mrs. Davis’ dresses and started for the woods, closely pursued by our men, who at first thought him a woman, but seeing his boots, while running suspected his sex at once. The race was a short one and the rebel President was soon brought to bay. He brandished a bowie knife of elegant pattern, and showed signs of battle, but yielded promptly to the persuasion of Colt’s revolvers, without compelling our men to fire.”

That sounds like a story writing correspondent of a New York paper. May 14th, General Wilson sent his third despatch to the Secretary. In it he said —“The device adopted by Davis was even more ignoble than I reported at first.”

At no time does he tell what it was. The northern papers said it was a “crinoline.”

January 17, 1867, from his Davenport, Iowa, home, General Wilson makes a supplemental report which he asked to have made part of the record.

He says “it is made from the original information in my possession” and adds, “No resistance was offered because the enemy had posted no sentries and were therefore taken completely by surprise. A man called

Colonel Pritchard's attention to three persons in female attire moving from a tent towards the woods. They were Miss Howell, Mrs. Davis and Jefferson Davis."

If this were true, it would prove that Colonel Pritchard's sentries at the Davis tent were not obeying orders.

In Colonel Pritchard's despatch to General Wilson he uses the term, "and family."

May 15, Captain J. C. Hathaway, Company D, 4th Michigan Cavalry, who assisted in the Pritchard raid, made a report at Macon, Ga., of his part, in very definite terms. He says "there were captured with Davis his four little children." Not a word about an escape, a bowie knife, or a woman's dress.

Can anybody believe Mr. and Mrs. Davis would abandon those "four little children" and flee to the woods?

When together, Bvt. Brig. General Minty was Colonel Pritchard's superior officer, and July 2, 1865, Colonel Pritchard made a report to him without any allusion to the alleged attempt at "escape," the "disguise," the "bowie knife" or "Colt's revolvers."

Colonel Pritchard on May 15, 1865, started via Augusta and Savannah for Fortress Monroe. He was ordered to deliver his charges to Major General Halleck and Bvt. Maj. General

Miles and proceed to Washington and report to Secretary Stanton.

We must let him tell his own story in detail, in order to get the facts, by which it will appear that until his report was filed, the Washington authorities believed General Wilson's reports of Davis attempting to escape in his wife's crinoline and of his showing fight.

"We reached Irwinsville about one o'clock in the morning of May 10th. Where passing my command as Confederates and inquiring for our train, representing that we were a rear guard left to fight the Yankees back, I learned about a train which had encamped the night before, one and a half miles out on the Abbeville road. There we found a camp. I halted my Company and sent Lieutenant Purington and twenty-five dismounted men, to circuit the camp. That being done, I put my column in motion and approached within four or five rods of the camp before we were discovered. In about fifteen minutes we heard guns from the skirmish between our and the 1st Wisconsin Cavalry pickets. We made a dash and captured the entire camp.

The surprise was so complete and the movement so sudden in its execution that few of the enemy were enabled to make the slightest defense, or even arouse from their slumbers in time to grasp their weapons, which were lying

by their sides. I placed a chain of mounted men around Davis' camp, and sentries at each tent and wagon.

Davis came out and said to me 'I suppose you consider it bravery to charge a train of defenceless women and children, but I consider it theft. It is vandalism.'

We captured Jefferson Davis, J. H. Reagan, his Post Master General; Colonel Morris, Colonel Johnston, Colonel Lubbeck, Captain Maurin, Captain Moody, Lieutenant Harriman, Private Secretary; Lieutenant Hathaway, J. D. Howell, midshipman in the rebel navy; Miss Maggie Howell, sister of Mrs. Davis; two waiting maids, one white, one colored, and several servants; five wagons, three ambulances, fifteen horses, about twenty-five or thirty mules. The wagons were mostly loaded with Commissory stores and private baggage. After caring for our wounded in the skirmish etc., I started for Macon and reached there the 13th. I was met at the outskirts of the city and ordered to select three officers and twenty men of my command to act as a guard, and depart at once for Washington, via Augusta and Savannah. Under orders of General Wilson I turned over all Privates captured, excepting two,— I received Clement C. Clay and wife. I reached Augusta the 14th and there received Alexander H. Stephens and



Major General Wheeler and staff. I arrived at Savannah May 16th, having marched two hundred miles in six days.

At Savannah we embarked on the Steamer Clyde for Fortress Munroe and arrived the 19th. We remained on board until the 22nd. Then I turned over all to General Halleck, except Davis and Clay and families. Later I delivered them to Bvt.-Major General Miles." (Up to now he has made no mention of an attempt to escape, of a bowie knife or a disguise.) He adds,—

"I received through General Miles an order from Assistant Secretary of War, Charles A. Dana, dated May 23rd, 'to be sure to bring with him the woman's dress in which Davis was captured.' I went to the Steamer Clyde and received from Mrs. Davis a lady's waterproof cloak or robe and which Mrs. Davis said was worn by Mr. Davis as a disguise at the time of the capture and which was identified by men who saw it on him at the time.

On the following morning the balance of the disguise, a shawl, was found and admitted by Mrs. Davis to be the one worn by Mr. Davis."

Thus Colonel Pritchard dispels the dress and more "ignoble" features of General Wilson's unnamed "captors" information.

In September 1865, Captain G. W. Lawton, 4th Michigan Cavalry, furnished an article to a New York paper in which he said "the dis-

guise was a waterproof and a shawl." Lieutenant Dickenson and Corporal Munger said "Mr. Davis wore a waterproof and shawl."

All of these reports and statements, excepting General Wilson's, were made *after* the caricatures had been published and "known of all men."

I hereby supplement the testimony by two witnesses who had reason to know the facts.

One of the Privates at the Davis tent with Colonel Pritchard, came to me with Boston Corbett. He had read the stories and seen the pictures. Because General Wilson had made the statements he had, to the Secretary, this Private declined to permit the use of his name, but asserted with the most positive declaration, that stories of the attempt to escape were untrue and the first he heard of such claims was when at the Christian Commission rooms in Washington he was shown them. He said Mr. Davis came out of his tent, had some "sharp words" with the Colonel and returned to prepare for the journey, and that the sentinels of which he was one, did not lose sight of Mr. Davis a moment while in the camp.

With Mr. Davis was captured James H. Jones, colored. At Montgomery in February, 1861, Davis was elected Confederate President, and soon after, Jones was assigned to him as

his personal servant, and was with him until Mr. Davis was imprisoned.

During Mr. Cleveland's administration, Jones was appointed a messenger at the United States Senate Stationery Office, under the direction of Charles N. Richards, formerly of Quincy, Mass., and remained there until 1912.

He was a large man with a decidedly military air, light complexion, very intelligent, polite and modest.

I had seen him several years without knowing his history. In March, 1907, my friend Richards told me about his history, said he was most faithful and truthful and introduced us. I drew from him the story of the capture. He denied that there was any dressing for, or attempt to escape, said it was not possible, as the sentries were with them all the time until they broke camp. He was positive that Mr. Davis did not have a bowie knife. Said "all there was to the 'dress yarn' arose from the fact that it was early in a damp morning, and Mr. Davis put on a shawl, which he customarily wore, and started to go out to meet the soldiers. Mrs. Davis, very much agitated said, 'Pa, don't go, those Yankees will shoot you.' He replied, 'they will treat me as a prisoner of war, you need not fear,' reached and took up a waterproof, nearly the same color as his and threw it about his neck and shoulders.

He then stepped outside and had some words with the officer. I saw that he had the wrong waterproof, and I immediately exchanged them.

It was early, before daylight. We were utterly surprised. Soon we were told we were prisoners. A Union officer ordered Mr. Davis to prepare for leaving immediately."

I asked Brown, "What about the attempt to escape, leaving the children?" He answered, "You couldn't have hired him to do it, if you had given him the Confederacy." He added, "We were treated civilly as they could on the journey North."

He wrote his card for me as follows—"Washington, March 25, 1907, Mr. Johnson, Sir — I was born at Raleigh, N. C. in 1833, March 27th, I am respectfully yours, James H. Jones, U. S. S. S. O."

He produced a buck horn handled cane, with a silver band, upon which was engraved, "Presented to James H. Jones in loving remembrance for faithful service. Mrs. Jefferson Davis." It was understood the horn was from a buck, shot by Mr. Davis.

Senator Williams secured the passage of an act by which Jones is in the south enjoying a life vacation and drawing his salary regularly.

I believe this story to be fully substantiated by the official records and competent evidence,

and that justice demands that the hasty and unwarranted stories as to Davis' capture, told in 1865, should be admitted to be erroneous, and that due credit should be given to Sergeant Corbett.

I submit this plain review and the facts, because of loving respect for our war President, friendship for the patriot Sergeant, and in deference to historical truth.

BYRON BERKELEY JOHNSON

Waltham, Mass., June, 1914

















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